(b) the number of carriers on service in the sector which are age old and whether Air India deploy new aeroplanes in Gulf-Kerala sector;

(c) the number of foreign airline companies that sought sanctions to operate services to Gulf sector from Thiruvananthapuram International Airport, the reasons, if any, for non-granting of permission to other carriers; and

(d) whether Government consider to permit the international freight companies who sought permission to operate services in the Gulf sector from Thiruvananthapuram?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) Air India operates 10 services to Gulf sector from Thiruvananthapuram International Airport. Besides this, Air India Express, a subsidiary company of Air India has also started its operations from Thiruvananthapuram to Gulf sector from 29.4.2005.

(b) The average age of Air India's fleet of A310-300 deployed from Thiruvananthapuram is about 15 years whereas the fleet of Air India Express comprises of new B737-800 aircraft.

(c) Four foreign airlines *viz.* Gulf Air, Kuwait Airways, Oman Air and Qatar Airways are already oprating their services to Thiruvananthapuram from Gulf destinations. Traffic rights are granted from time to time keeping in view the market demand and interests of the airlines and political/ diplomatic considerations.

(d) The Government follows an Open Sky Policy for all cargo operations. Accordingly, foreign airlines are permitted to operate any number of freighter services to/from India.

Helicopter services to religious places

†816. SHRIMATI SAVITA SHARDA: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether any proposal for introducing helicopter services to make smooth access to religious places and tourist sites located in remote areas is under consideration of Government;

(b) if so, the details thereof; and

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

(c) by when the final decision is to be taken in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) and (b) Pawan Hans Helicopters Limited (PHHL) is already operating passenger services to Kedarnath and Badrinath Dham twice in a year (May-June and September-October) in Uttaranchal and recently provided helicopters on lease to M/s Jagson Airlines Limited for services to Amarnath Dham. Besides, Air Deccan is also providing air services to Mata Vaishnodevi Shrine.

(c) PHHL takes decision from time to connect important tourist places etc. depending upon demand and necessary permission from the State Governments etc.

Cancellation of flights from Vishakhapatnam

817. SHRI S.M. LALJAN BASHA: Will the Minister of CIVIL AVIATION be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that Indian Airlines or Alliance Air has abruptly cancelled flights in June, 2005 from Vishakhapatnam;

(b) the number of flights which were cancelled which touch Vishakhapatnam in an abrupt manner;

(c) the reasons for such abrupt cancellations of flights using Vishakhapatnam Airport;

(d) in what way did Indian Airlines compensate passengers who had booked travel and planned journeys much ahead of time;

(e) whether Government will take steps to reduce such abrupt cancellation of flights in the future; and

(f) if so, the details thereof?

THE MINISTER OF STATE OF THE MINISTRY OF CIVIL AVIATION (SHRI PRAFUL PATEL): (a) to (c) In the month of June, 2005, five Alliance Air flights operating to/from Vishakhapatnam had to be cancelled—three due to technical snags and two due to bird hit incidents. Hence, these flights were cancelled due to the reasons beyond the control of airline.

(d) All possible assistance and facilitation was provided to the passengers of the cancelled flights including hotel accommodation and